

in our time—could be cathedral builders. We can be a great founding generation, like the founding fathers. And what a wonderful uplifting, thrilling, unifying sense of purpose that can provide. America itself at the very beginning was a big idea; the biggest idea in the political history of the world. That could happen again.

John Adams, who was one of the most remarkable of our Founding Fathers and whose wife Abigail has left us a record unlike that of any other spouse of a political leader of that time, set something down on paper in the Spring of 1776 that ought to be better known. It's called *Thoughts on Government*. It was originally written as a letter to the eminent legal scholar, George Wythe of Virginia. It was about twelve pages long and when other Members of Congress asked him for a copy he sat there, by candlelight, at night in a room in a house across the street from the City Tavern in Philadelphia, copying it all down. And then Richard Henry Lee of Virginia suggested that it be published.

Keep in mind please that it was written before the Declaration of Independence. And listen to the language, listen to the quality of the language, which of course, is the quality of thinking. That's what writing is: thinking. That's why it's so hard.

"It has been the will of heaven that we, the Member of Congress, should be thrown into existence in a period when the greatest philosophers and lawgivers of antiquity would have wished to have lived." Right away, you see, he's saying, it is the will of heaven, there are larger forces than we ourselves, and he's applying the moment against the standard of the past: antiquity. It is to a very large degree, a lesson in proportion. "A period when a coincidence of circumstances without an example has afforded to thirteen colonies at once an opportunity at beginning government anew from the foundation and building as they choose." New, unprecedented, and they may choose. "How few of the human race have ever had an opportunity of choosing a system of government for themselves and for their children." And here is the sentence I dearly love. "How few have ever had anything more of choice in government than in climate."

He proposed a bicameral legislature. "A representative assembly," he called it, "an exact portrait in miniature of the people at large," balanced by a second "distinct" smaller legislative body that it may "check and correct the errors of the other." Checks and balances. There was to be an executive whose power was to include the appointment of all judges, and command of the armed forces, but who was to be chosen—and you'll like this—who was to be chosen by the two houses of legislature and for no more than a year at a time.

At the close, he also wrote this—and think about this please, as maybe a clue to what the cathedral we build might be. "Laws for the liberal education of youth are so extremely wise and useful that to a humane and generous mind no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant."

Then after another month or so he sat down and wrote a letter to a friend back in Massachusetts, a fellow son of Liberty. April, 1776. Carved into a mantelpiece at the White House, in the State Dining Room, is the prayer—the wishful prayer taken from a letter Adams wrote to his wife Abigail after his second or third night as President in the White House—the first American to occupy the White House as President—in which he says, "May only wise and honest men rule here."

I offer for your consideration the possibility that what I'm about to read might be carved, if not in a mantelpiece, somewhere

in our Capitol where it would have appropriate attention. I can think of almost no other line from any of the founders so appropriate, so pertinent, to what you face—what we all face—not just in problems, not just in personal animosities or contention or rivalries, but what we face in the way of opportunity: to be builders as they were. Because he establishes both a way and a warning: "We may please ourselves with the prospect of free and popular governments. God grant us the way. But I fear that in every assembly, members will obtain an influence by noise not sense, by meanness not greatness, by ignorance not learning, by contracted hearts not large souls. There is one thing my dear sir that must be attempted and most sacredly observed or we are all undone. There must be decency and respect and veneration introduced for persons of every rank or we are undone. In a popular government this is our only way."

I salute you all. I salute you as a fellow citizen, as a fellow American, as the father of five children, as the grandfather of nine children. I salute you as one who has spent a good part of his working life trying to write some of the history of your great institution.

Our country deserves better—from all of us. But we look especially to our leaders as we should rightfully do. And there are no more important leaders than you. We don't expect you to be perfect. We do expect hard work, diligence, imagination, a little humor, civility, and especially, the sense that there is really no limitation to what we, a free people, can do. And that, with the grace of God, and a common sense of purpose, there is no limit—which has always been at the heart of the vision of America since the beginning.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Colorado.

Mr. SKAGGS. I just wanted to commend the gentleman in the well and his colleague from the incoming class, the gentlewoman from Missouri, JO ANN EMERSON, who made a tremendous difference in our efforts to plan this undertaking and see it through to a successful conclusion.

I think he made the very important point that no organization as large as this one is able to get anything done if we do not have some minimum level of trust in each other, especially across the aisle. You cannot accomplish that if you do not spend a little bit of time getting to know each other. That was part of what this retreat was about. It is primarily not just about good feelings but the fact that without some minimal level of trust and mutual respect, we cannot get the country's work done, and that is what we are all here to do.

FLORIDA'S RELEASE OF VIOLENT CRIMINALS MARKS SAD DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. WEXLER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, today is a very sad day for Floridians and for all Americans. Nearly 1,000 criminals who have committed the most heinous crimes imaginable have been released from Florida's prisons without serving nearly their full sentences. Once again the victims and their families will relive the worst nightmare, knowing that

the criminal who destroyed their lives is free to commit the crime again.

This is an outrage, and Congress must stop it now. Imagine it was your 6-year-old son who was sexually molested by a friend you trusted enough to bring into your home. Imagine it was your wife or sister who was brutally raped. Imagine it was your 17-year-old son who was repeatedly stabbed to death. These are not hypothetical examples. All of these vile criminals were among the 1,000 prisoners already released from Florida's prisons.

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The criminals who committed these heinous crimes are now walking free due to a U.S. Supreme Court decision that creates a so-called constitutionally protected right to gain time, an early release mechanism created by Florida officials in 1983 to alleviate prison overcrowding. History shows that a frighteningly high percentage of these criminals will molest, murder, and rape again and again.

Last month Floridians saw a chilling example of what happens when violent felons are released from jail prematurely. Lawrence Singleton was released after serving only 8 years, only 8 years of his 14-year sentence for raping a 15-year-old girl, severing her forearms, and leaving her for dead. This young girl lived. But last month Singleton struck again and murdered a Tampa woman.

How many Floridians must die because of this absurd U.S. Supreme Court decision? The whole premise of gain time is a contradiction. Releasing violent prisoners before they serve their full sentence is just plainly wrong. A child molester, a murderer, or a rapist has earned absolutely nothing. For years Florida was known as the crime capital of the United States. The U.S. Supreme Court has slapped law-abiding Floridians in the face.

That is why Congressmen FOLEY, MCCOLLUM, and I today filed a bipartisan constitutional amendment empowering States to keep their violent offenders behind bars and allowing the American people the opportunity to exercise common sense when our Supreme Court has failed to do so.

Our sheriffs can catch them, our State attorneys can prosecute them, our judges and juries can sentence them, our State legislatures can appropriate the money to build the prisons. But after all, this ridiculous loophole sets these violent people free.

Something is dramatically wrong when a technicality and interpretation by judicial decree overrides good sense, good judgment, and good government when as many as 16,000 dangerous criminals are free to terrorize our neighborhoods and when the Supreme Court places the rights of violent criminals above the rights of law-abiding citizens.

The Constitution of the United States must be changed.